

AN: We've reached the antepenultimate – yes, that's actually a word – story, which means only two more to go after this. I warned you last time that it's all downhill from here, so if you need a pillow to cower behind, get one now.

Poison

Showdown

Sarafina wondered why she slept with Moto.

It was a rather baffling decision to make. As far as scuzzy scumbags went, Moto was probably the worst. His life seemed to perpetually revolve around taking drugs and having sex; an endless constant that would drive most people insane. But no – he was perfectly happy with his worthless existence. He would get high day after day until he could get high no more. That wouldn't be happening anytime soon, however. He just kept on going, and going, and going...

The guy was a good screw, I guess, Sarafina thought, nestled away in her little den she had made for herself in the jungle. For once, she hadn't been smoking or snorting anything. For whatever reason – she didn't really know – it seemed that a few moments of thought were much more preferable to lighting up a joint or taking another hit of Sumu. Not that it would last long; her addiction was far too strong by this point. *And a good screw is better than a bad screw.*

In some ways, the lioness was quite compatible with Moto. She didn't really have any hopes or ambitions in life, aside from a fleeting dream to be a super soldier space pirate when she was a cub. That didn't seem like a likely occupation, though. Ever since she had been exposed to the relieving effects of drugs at a party one night – thanks to a rather persuasive duo known as Timon and Pumbaa – it seemed that she just couldn't get enough. The weed, the coke, the Sumu... it got her through the day. It gave her strength, it gave her energy, and it gave her a general feeling of wellbeing. Feeling good was all that mattered. What else was there other than happiness?

Sex figured into that, of course. She had been to more than a few Mixers in her time, and they had proved to be almost as addictive as the drugs. Everyone at the parties seemed to understand Sarafina's wants and needs; they were all like one big happy family. Well, maybe not family, considering the sexual aspects that were going on – that would just be gross – but they were certainly very close friends. And when very close friends wanted to please each other, things tended to

get quite exciting... In fact, after mixing both sex and drugs together – a pretty wild combination – Sarafina thought that she had achieved her own vision of heaven. It was perfect.

So, just to recap: drugs plus sex with Moto equals perfection.

Something about that just didn't seem right in Sarafina's head. She had never complained about having sex with some odd animals before – from a snake to some anonymous guy who didn't even want to show his face – but with Moto... something just didn't seem right. The guy had a weird kind of aura surrounding him; his head didn't seem to be quite in the right place. He didn't look or sound insane, but you could never tell with these kinds of people. They were dangerous...

You must be tripping, girl, Sarafina told herself, glancing at the stash of drugs she kept hidden under a bush in front of her. *Or maybe you need to trip... You ain't thinking straight. So maybe Moto was a little bit creepy; that doesn't mean he's, like, a killer. Besides, it's not like you're ever gonna sleep with him again. His junk wasn't even that big.*

As much as Sarafina told herself that she wouldn't have anything to do with Moto again, she somehow doubted it. Having only met him a few hours ago – an incredibly short relationship – she was pretty sure that she didn't know the whole story yet. He might be a great guy, for all she knew. Maybe if she got to know him better, then things could improve between them both. Sharing a needle or two with him could get things started; she already did that enough with her other friends. Not that she had slept with Maji or anything. Well, maybe once...

The lioness rolled away from her stash of purchased drugs, still holding off on using some of them. She couldn't hide for ever, of course; she could already feel her skin itching and crawling. Her claws felt like they were on fire. A fire that could not be extinguished unless she snorted another good hit of Sumu... That was a whole new inferno, though.

Sarafina sneezed, wiping snot from her nose with a paw. The jungle tended to get pretty dusty around here, especially at night, and she found herself sneezing more and more lately. Perhaps she had a cold coming on. Yet another reason to take some drugs; it took her mind off everything that was troubling her.

It took the lioness a few moments to realise that she hadn't wiped snot away from her nose, but blood. She narrowed her eyes, realising that the sneeze must have triggered a nosebleed. Again. *That* seemed to

be happening quite often, too. *Jesus, what the hell is wrong with you, yo? Can't even sneeze properly...*

A very brief thought crossed her mind that maybe it was the Sumu itself which had caused these uncomfortable symptoms – that was actually the truth of the matter, of course – but the notion was thrown away within a few seconds. Sumu was great. It couldn't hurt you. You might get a little headache afterwards, but that was just because of the intensity. She needed to toughen up and take it like a man. Then things would get better.

You'll see him again, Sarafina thought, coming to a decision on her Moto dilemma. The guy was a good screw, so the least she could do was give him another chance. The worst that could happen was that he would try to rape her or something; she could deal with that. It wasn't like he was capable of anything else. That would just be silly. *It only hurts the first time.*

Turning her attention to more important matters, Sarafina eyed her precious horde of illegal substances. She wondered whether to use her nose or the needle.

She went with the needle.

Moto wondered why he slept with Sarafina.

Because she's hot, yo.

Sarafina regarded Moto with disdain, disgusted to even be touching him. His fur felt slimy and wet and infected with God only knows what. She could tell just by looking at him that he hadn't bathed in weeks; she was surprised that his claws hadn't turned a sickly shade of yellow by now. He was that disgusting.

Still, she needed the little scumbag for her plan to work. He hinged on it, in fact. A small price to pay when it could mean the end of this horrible empire that the Family of Blood had created. They may not have been responsible for her own addiction, but they were just as bad as Death, and they needed to be stopped.

"We use him to get to them?" said Bora, looking just as repulsed by the cub as Sarafina did. They had that much in common, at least. "How? What, does he know their secret drug dealer passcode to get into that shack of dirt?"

"He's their best dealer," remarked TPYMK with a smile, causing

Sarafina to smile in turn. She knew that she could always count on him to understand. He always did. "They won't risk allowing him to die."

"Yeah? So what?" said Bora, still looking a little unconvinced. "And how exactly is that going to help us?"

"You don't get it," Sarafina said. "We use Moto to lure 'em out, and then we can, like, exchange him for someone else. They may be a family, but I bet you anything that they'll sell out their brother or their sister if it means getting their best dealer back. To them, it's all about making cheddar."

"Seems a little thin to me," Bora remarked. "What's stopping them from bringing out that little firing squad that ambushed us before?"

"Cause they won't," replied Sarafina, shaking her head. "They don't wanna risk accidentally shooting this little creep in the head. They need him." She looked up at TPYMK. "It's a solid plan... right?"

TPYMK nodded. "It's the best we've got," he agreed. "If we can arrest someone on the inside, they'll know a lot more about the business than him. Even if they'll only exchange Moto for the cook, that's still a whole lot of evidence."

Bora remained silent for a few moments. "Fine," he said, giving in. "But if this goes up in smoke like last your last plan, I'm calling in backup, and there's not a damn thing you or anybody else can do to stop me."

"Whatever you say," TPYMK said, showing no signs of putting up a fight. He seemed... confident, almost. "We show up with Moto, and they won't fire a single bullet at us. He's practically a life jacket."

"Can I be a condom instead?" Moto interjected, causing all eyes to focus on him. "Cause that'd make me, like, *super* horny."

"No!"

Zira let out a roar that shook the earth, lashing out at the table and turning it over with an aggressive show of strength. She clawed and kicked at the inanimate object, snapping one of the legs off and throwing it against the wall, where it splintered into fragments. Vitani had never seen her so mad before; it was terrifying.

"Mom, calm down!" Vitani said, not expecting her to exhibit so much anger upon being told that Sarafina had made away with Moto. The idiot hadn't put up a fight, of course; he was always so zapped that he

seldom cared about anything other than how hot the lioness in front of him was. "Please! Just for a minute! You're going to hurt yourself!"

"I don't care about myself!" Zira yelled, wiping fragments of Sumu from her nose. Vitani could tell that she had been using again while she was gone. Her mother's addiction was back with a vengeance. *"Those filthy rats! I'm going to bury their balls in a bathtub of acid!"*

"You won't be able to do anything if you don't control yourself," Vitani warned, concerned more for her mother's wellbeing than that of the stupid drug business she had gotten herself involved with. "Just stop it!"

Truth be told, Vitani was rather sick of it by this point. The workload she was faced with every single day had completely drained her of energy. She was so tired by the end of the day that she would sleep on the floor just to get some relief. The cub had never wanted to get mixed up in this business. She had no interest in drugs, and never had any intention of getting involved with them until her mother had roped her into it. Sure, the money was good, but it wasn't as if she had any time to spend it. She hadn't even bought a bar of candy by this point.

However, she kept on going. She loved her mother, and had tried with as much effort as possible to get her off of her addiction. For a while, she had succeeded, but now she was back on Sumu – and plenty of other substances – again. Her mood was worse than ever, and deteriorating by the day. Vitani didn't know how long it would be before she suffered a heart attack or choked on her own vomit and died. What would she do without her mother to guide her?

Zira finally stopped, breathing heavily as she stood in the midst of the wreckage that was once the table. A few of the chairs had been scattered to either side of the room due to the chaos. However, it seemed that the leader of the Family of Blood had composed herself – for now.

"Mom, just *listen* to me," Vitani said, walking towards Zira and placing a paw gently on her shoulder. "We have to think about the welfare of the business. Now, how are we going to get Moto back?"

"I'll make sure those rats are blown sky high," Zira said, thinking of the impressive security force that had almost succeeded in killing TPYMK, Sarafina and Bora earlier in the day. "They won't get away this time."

"No," Vitani said, shaking her head. "That won't work. And, as sleazy as he is, we can't risk losing our top dealer. What if they end up

shooting him by accident?"

Zira processed the thought. Logic and anger were fighting against each other in her mind. However, it seemed that she was seeing sense when it came to this difficult situation. "All right, sweetie," she said, flashing her daughter a smile. "Then we'll deal with this matter in a different way."

"How do you mean?" asked Vitani, curious.

Zira's smile broadened into a malicious grin. "*Personally*."

"All right, sad sack, this is how it's gonna work," Bora said, fixing Moto with his most threatening stare as he talked to him on the top of the embankment. It wasn't too hard. "You see that field down there?" He jerked his head in the direction of the shack, which was surrounded on all sides by grass that, it had to be said, looked a little bit worse for wear.

"Yeah, yo," Moto replied, earning a slap across the face from Bora. That felt good. With a face like his, the little punk was practically begging for a punch.

"Say you understand!" snapped Bora. He was trying to instill as much fear as possible in the cub; it was the only way the idiot would actually listen and follow through with the plan as instructed. "*Now!*"

"All right, all right! I get it!" said Moto, holding up his forepaws. "What the hell do you want me to do, man?"

"You're gonna stand in the middle of the field," Bora told him, "and wait there until your bosses show up." This was the part of the plan that hinged purely on a theory of Sarafina's. If they knew that Moto had been taken, then surely they would rush right over to him if he suddenly showed up again. Of course, that wasn't a certainty, but in light of recent circumstances, a simple assumption would have to do for now.

"And what happens when they show up?" Moto asked, his eyes glazing over. It seemed that he had the attention span of a goldfish. Possibly even less than that.

"When they *do* show up," said Bora, "we're going to move in and see if we can end this little crack whore operation for good."

"Whatever, dude," said Moto, clearly zoning out for the millionth time

that day. His brain just wasn't functioning properly. His captors could only wonder how many drugs it would take before his body would completely shut down on him. "I'll take care of business."

"You'd better," Bora snarled, "or I'll stick a gun up your butt sideways and pull the trigger. Got it?"

"Yeah," Moto said, before being pushed in the direction of the field by the detective. "I've got this, man! I've got this!"

The cub staggered down the field, leaving TPYMK, Sarafina and Bora hoping – quite desperately – that Moto would follow their orders. If not, then they all agreed that they would shoot him in the face. Taking turns.

"Think he'll do it?" said Bora, sounding doubtful. "If there's one thing I've learned then it's never to trust a junkie."

Sarafina scoffed. "Screw you," she said, earning a funny look from Bora, only for her to realise that he had no idea she had been a former drug addict. "I'm just saying, uh... you never know, yo."

Bora shook his head, looking up at TPYMK. "What do you think, maestro?" he asked. "I seriously doubt his brain is capable of counting to one, let alone listening to explicit instructions."

"He'll do it," TPYMK said. "Fear is quite an effective motivator. If he thinks he'll come out of this clean then he's likely to listen to us."

"But he's not gonna come out of it clean," said Sarafina, a pleased smile on her face. "He's going down, man."

"Damn right," agreed Bora with a brief nod of his head. "Along with the rest of those Sumu-slinging sluts."

"See?" said TPYMK, flicking his head in the direction of the field. "He's standing there, just like you told him."

Moto was indeed standing in the middle of the field, looking around nervously, as if trying to figure out how to escape. He wouldn't, though. The moment he tried anything, Sarafina would hunt him down within seconds – and *then* he would be sorry. He had no choice but to do as they said.

"I think we have movement," muttered Bora, watching as the door to the shack flew open, revealing a lioness – one who looked very rough and angry – and her decidedly weaker cub. Both of them wore stern

expressions on their faces, however. They were ready to deal with business, just as TPYMK, Bora and Sarafina were.

"Let's do this," Bora said, starting for the duo, only for TPYMK to stop him.

"Wait a minute," TPYMK said. "Let's make sure they don't try anything first."

"We can't let them get that junkie—"

"They won't," TPYMK interrupted. "Trust me."

"You'd better be sure about this," said Bora, although he didn't really feel like trusting TPYMK at all. He knew what the former detective – a baby killer – was capable of, and you could never put faith in someone like that. No one could do something so horrible and come out with their soul still intact...

"I'm sure," said TPYMK, narrowing his eyes as he watched the lioness and her cub approach Moto. "One minute, and then we'll know the coast is clear."

"Doesn't matter," said Sarafina, confident that she would soon be witnessing the end of this awful business that had caused so many lives to suffer. "What's one minute?"

"Moto," said Zira, stopping in front of the cub. She noticed that he looked incredibly nervous. Almost instantly, she knew that he was obviously doing this under orders from those rats that had kidnapped him. "What's going on?"

"They nabbed me, yo," Moto explained. "It was, like, *rape*, only without the junk and the jizz and the—"

"We get the idea," Vitani cut in, not in the mood for dealing with either intruders or another one of Moto's filthy speeches. "And why'd they let you go?"

"They didn't," said Moto, resisting the urge to glance in the direction of his captors, who were gathered at the top of the embankment. "They're up there, man. They want to talk to you."

"They want to talk to us?" said Zira, raising an eyebrow at the embankment. She spotted TPYMK, Sarafina and Bora easily. They weren't hiding; they wanted to be seen. "They all cops?"

"Nah," Moto said. "Not Sarafina, anyway."

Zira grinned. "Then let them talk," she said. "Whatever happens, by the end of this, we'll be coming out on top."

"Rat trap..." muttered Vitani.

"Let's go," TPYMK said.

TPYMK, Sarafina, and Bora made their way down the hill, heading right for Zira and Vitani. They showed no signs of fear; they couldn't afford to with these maniacs. This has to be done in an effective and professional manner. TPYMK certainly had experience with such tasks before...

"So you finally show yourselves," remarked Zira with disgust. She didn't even like looking at these three intruders who had dumped themselves on her territory. "Thought you cowards would've scrambled after being shot at."

"You're not jerking us around any longer, lady," said Bora, staring into the lioness's eyes. "HPD. You can't do anything."

"Is that so?" Zira said with a smile. "In case you haven't noticed, we own this city, and there's nothing that a couple of cops can do about it. You're way in over your heads."

"You won't own anything for much longer," said TPYMK, grabbing Moto firmly by the shoulder before he had a chance to side with Zira and Vitani. He was trapped with them. "Not while we have your top dealer, at least."

Zira chuckled, shaking her head. "This is juvenile," she said. "Just what do you think is going to happen here, anyway, huh?"

"We propose an exchange," TPYMK said, taking charge of the conversation. He thought himself as the leader of this trio, anyway. If Bora wanted to catch the Family of Blood then he would have to listen to him. "Say... we give you your best dealer back if you hand over your cook."

Zira stared at TPYMK for a few moments, looking as though she was considering the offer. But then she laughed. "I don't think so," she said. "There ain't gonna be no exchange today, or any day. We don't deal with cops."

"Then you have no dealer," TPYMK said. "If you don't accept this offer, then we'll kill Moto. We can make it look like an accident; the only names that will be stained are yours. You can say goodbye to your enormous profits, your brilliant sales power. It all goes down the drain without him, as much as I hate to say it." He glanced down at Moto, who was still firmly in his grasp.

"There isn't going to be an exchange," Zira told him, "because we're taking him back from you."

TPYMK gritted his teeth as he felt a gun being pressed against the back of his head. A quick glance in Sarafina's and Bora's direction told him that they had guns trained on them, too. They were cornered.

The former detective turned around to be faced with three tough lions; he guessed that they must have been the ones who were shooting at them before. All three of them were holding pistols.

"What do you call this, anyway?" TPYMK asked, looking back at Zira.

"Playing dirty," said Zira, her smile widening. "You're defenceless. You never had a hope in hell of accomplishing anything today. As I said, you're way in over your heads." She chuckled. "Pretty pathetic to think you had a chance."

"So what happens now?" TPYMK asked, although he had a very good idea of what her response would be.

"We kill you," said Zira, which was what TPYMK had expected, "and take our dealer back. By the time we're done, there won't be anything left. We've got a good cook. He'll know what to do with your remains."

"Mom," Vitani piped up, whispering into her mother's ear. "I don't think this is such a good idea."

"What are you talking about?" Zira snapped. "You telling me you're growing a conscience now?"

"No – nothing like that," Vitani quickly replied. "I'm just saying... even if we get rid of them properly, HPD aren't just gonna ignore the disappearance of two cops. They'll coming looking. Probably around here. They know that's where our dealers operate."

Zira stayed silent for a few seconds, contemplating on what her daughter had said. She weighed up the pros and cons before coming to a decision; one that she was confident would satisfy her.

"Hmm..." she said. "Perhaps you have a point." She looked up at TPYMK, Sarafina, and Bora. "All right. Tell you what, maybe we can work out an exchange after all."

"Is that so?" asked TPYMK, hoping that Zira had reconsidered and would refrain from having them all shot in the head.

"Yeah," Zira said, still wearing a smile, as if it pleased her. TPYMK couldn't fathom why losing her best cook would be considered a celebrated loss, though. "Since you two are cops, I think it's best that we let you go. However..."

And her eyes fell upon Sarafina.

"You ain't."

Sarafina remained silent – frozen with fear – as Zira carried on talking. "I remember you," she said. "You're just a filthy rat who used to deal for Death."

Bora's expression registered surprise and realisation upon hearing that from Zira. *That little slut*, he thought, staring at Sarafina, as the mystery behind the destruction of Death's drug empire became crystal clear. *She helped him torch the lab...*

"And I guess you went blabbing to the cops," said Zira. "Well... can't have that, now, can we?" She laughed. "All right. Here's the exchange. You give her to us, and we let you go. Otherwise, we just waste all three of you right now. What's it gonna be?"

TPYMK was about to reply that he would never let them get their paws on Sarafina again in a million years – but someone else spoke first.

"Deal," Bora said.

TPYMK and Sarafina both stared in horror at Bora, while Zira seemed more than pleased by the outcome of her offer.

"Done," said Zira, and she signalled for her burly guards to seize Sarafina. "Take her inside."

"*What the hell are you doing?*" TPYMK yelled at Bora, who remained silent as two of the lions grabbed Sarafina and began to drag her away.

"*No! No! Get off me!*" Sarafina screamed, struggling as she tried to escape from the guards. A few hard kicks to the stomach in retaliation

knocked the wind right out of her, causing her efforts to cease as they hauled her towards the shack. She wouldn't stop shouting, though. *"Get off me! Get off!"*

"Sarafina!" TPYMK cried, moving towards her, only for the remaining guard to aim at him with his gun.

"You stay right there!" Zira warned. "Don't try anything."

"No! No! No!" Sarafina looked pleadingly at TPYMK as she was taken away. *"Help!"*

"I'll think of something!" TPYMK cried as she was shoved roughly inside the shack. The metal door slammed shut behind them, followed by silence.

Sarafina was gone.

TPYMK could only look on helplessly, ignoring the evil smile on Zira's face. He had seen what the Family of Blood had done to Sarafina before, and couldn't bear to imagine what they had planned for her now...

"Nice doing business with you," Zira said, before motioning to the other guard. "Get 'em out of here."

The former detective gave Zira a final glare. One that was filled with hatred.

"This isn't over," he promised.

"Really?" said Zira, beaming at him. "Looks like it is now."

The guard shoved TPYMK in the direction of the embankment, with Bora following obediently by his side. Defeated.

"What did I tell you?" Zira said to Vitani. "We'll come out on top."

It was true. The Family of Blood had won. Again.

The cell was dark and cold.

Sarafina whimpered as she shivered from the bitter wind that whistled through the iron bars fixed to the small window, which only allowed several thin beams of moonlight to shine into the room. Otherwise, she was surrounded by blackness.

The chains fixed around her forelegs and hind legs rattled as she moved around, giving her the morbidly amusing appearance of some ghostly poltergeist. In her current situation, she certainly *wished* that she were dead.

Her head whipped round as the heavy metal door opposite the window groaned open, revealing a darkened figure, his features masked by the absence of illumination. Sarafina could only see his outline.

"Hey, baby," said the voice, and Sarafina knew at once who it was.

Moto stepped into the cell, slamming the door shut behind him, where it locked with a loud *clunk!* He was wearing a sinister grin on his face; the expression that had made her uneasy ever since they had first crossed paths. And now that she was chained up in an impregnable cell, there was no way to escape him.

"The nice pussies up there have given me to you," Moto said, moving towards Sarafina, who shrunk fearfully into the corner of the cell. "They said I could do whatever I want with you. That sounds killer to me." His grin widened. "But... after what you did to me before... that was kind of mean. I suppose you have to learn your lesson."

Buzz!

Sarafina's eyes widened in horror as a crackle of electricity appeared on the tip of Moto's raised forepaw. It took her a few moments to realise that he was holding some kind of grisly handheld taser weapon, albeit a slightly modified one.

"They said this won't knock you out," Moto reflected, staring at the taser, "but I guess that's a bad thing for you."

The lioness shook her head frantically, unable to speak a word, completely paralysed with terror.

"Sorry," Moto apologised, as he moved towards her with the torturous implement. "But if you're allowed to hurt me, then I'm allowed to hurt you..."

"No..." Sarafina finally spoke out. "No... no... no..."

Moto jabbed the taser into Sarafina's stomach, his eyes lighting up with sadistic pleasure as the cell was filled with her wails of agony.

And then the fun began.

AN: What can I say? As far as antepenultimate – honestly, how many other times am I gonna get to use that word? – stories go, that was a pretty big one. The Family of Blood has finally bettered TPYMK and imprisoned Sarafina, no thanks to Bora. What a terrible note to end on. I wait in eager anticipation for your reviews for *this* one...